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ABSTRACT

In 1974 the Swedish national higher education agency undertook a study of educational planning at the local and regional levels. It was hoped that by investigating and discussing the problems involved the study would contribute to discussion within institutions and planning bodies prior to implementation of the 1977 national reform of higher education. The focus was to be on planning in which decentralization could be combined with attainment of national policy goals, effectiveness, and capacity for innovation. This report summarizes the progress and results of the study. (MSE)

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PLANNING FOR CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

CONCLUSION OF THE NBUC FUNCTIONAL STUDY

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In November 1974 the Office of the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities (from 1977-10-01 the National Board of Universities and Colleges) resolved on a functional study of educational planning at local and regional levels. It was hoped that, by investigating and discussing the problems involved, this study would contribute towards the discussions within institutions and planning bodies prior to the implementation of the 1977 reform of higher education. The terms of reference provided that the study was to focus on the promotion of planning and organization whereby the decentralization of responsibilities and planning could be combined with attainment of national policy goals for higher education and also with effectiveness and innovation capacity.

The project has been led by Bertil Östergren, expert adviser to the National Board of Universities and Colleges (hereafter referred to as NBUC). Torsten Kälvemark, Head of Section at the NBUC, was project secretary during the first phase and was succeeded for the second phase by Barbro Berg, also Head of Section at the NBUC.

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STRATEGY AND METHOD

The functional study can be described as a clinical study aimed at charting dysfunctions in governance, planning and organization of higher education and at discussing and recommending countermeasures. It is a critical study concentrating above all on shortcomings with regard to effectiveness and innovation capacity. The aim has not been to put forward detailed proposals but rather to draw attention to problems and to indicate desirable courses of change.

The approach adopted for the investigation does not agree with conventional survey methods or conventional research methods. Instead it represents a third way. The reports which have been submitted are above all based on systematic but informal interviews of a few hundred teachers, administrators and students at universities and colleges. Secondly, a review has been made of native and foreign literature concerning the planning and organization of higher education, among other topics, in addition to which a study has been made of universities in other countries. The aim has been to view Swedish higher education as far as possible in an international comparative context. Thirdly, certain special studies have been undertaken, the results of which have been amenable to statistical processing. These studies have comprised a survey of the minutes of all educational program committees for one year, a questionnaire addressed to all directors of studies concerning their working conditions and a questionnaire (sample survey) concerning educational innovations. Fourthly, seven case studies have been made of innovation processes. Finally, discussions have taken place at a number of seminars within the UHÄ and elsewhere.

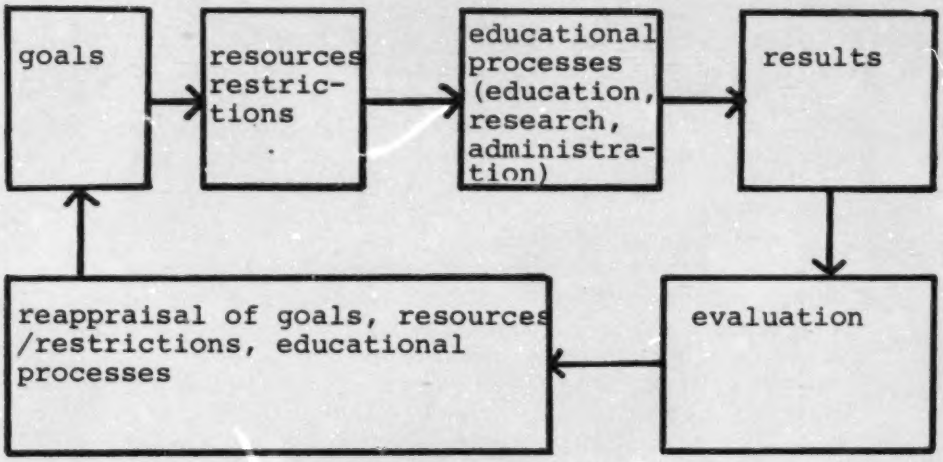
Four reports have been presented under the common heading "Planning for Change in Higher Education". The first interim report focussed on problems and basic principles, the second covered the tasks and functions of the central and regional levels, the third is a report on the investigations of innovations and innovation processes, and the fourth is a final report containing conclusions and recommendations.

PROBLEMS AND BASIC PRINCIPLES

The first interim report, presented in May 1975, contained four main sections: 1. basic principles of educational planning, 2. general problems of educational planning, 3. organizational principles of higher education, 4. problems connected with institutional organization.

It has been said that there are three different ways of looking at higher education - as ideal models, as a system of rules and formal organization, or as an everyday reality. Official inquiries tend to examine reality with reference to ideal models and formal systems. The study presented here has instead been aimed at critically appraising ideal models together with formal rules and formal organization in the light of everyday reality.

The discussion of basic principles is based on the following rudimentary model of educational planning.



There is insufficient analysis and discussion of the goals of education. This observation does not apply any advocacy of a technological approach to education, together with a complete system of goal definitions and a more or less mechanical reduction of overarching goals to subordinate ones. Discussions of goals ought instead to have the primary purpose of generating awareness of the goal images on which education is actually based, so that no educational goals are allowed to live on without being questioned, critically analysed and reappraised. Goal conflicts must be brought out into the open and debated. The existence of "hidden" educational aims must be made clear. Priorities have to be determined, and in this process goals should be primarily stated as desired directions of change.

Another neglected sphere of planning is the evaluation of activities. Since goals are primarily regarded as desired directions of change, the evaluation of activities should focus on defining the extent to which the desired changes have been achieved. Above all, activity evaluation should imply self-appraisal in the various parts of the organization. This must take place against the background of the check which has now been imposed on the tremendous post-war expansion of the resources allotted for higher education and research; in future, priorities will have to be reordered and certain activities wound up in order to facilitate expansion and new activities in other areas. Where efficiency measures are concerned, cost awareness must above all focus on educational methods, the most important thing being the use which is made of teachers' and students' time.

The general problems discussed in the first interim report include, for example, the new student categories and their needs, the retention of links between education and research in an age of mass education, and means whereby the relationship between education and working life can be made critical and forward-looking instead of conserving existing vocational roles and social structures.

An antithesis of central importance to the study is that existing between the real governance mechanisms in universities and colleges and what is known as "the mythology of central governance". Higher education in Sweden is subject to a relatively powerful degree of central control through the medium of rules and formal organization. Moreover, governance is characcerized by the great importance which it attaches to various formal bodies and the regulation of their activities. Governance is dominated by isolated decisions on different points. It is assumed that decisions will have the intended effects on the points to which they refer and that the "rationality" underlying decisions will lead to a corresponding "rationality" in their effects.

But the internal life of universities and colleges is to a great extent guided by interests and needs attached to their organization into disciplines and subject departments and to the status of research and graduate studies. Various bodies above departmental level tend to respect each other's efforts towards resource maximization, to preserve the balance between power centres and to safeguard the status quo.

Central governance is often out of step with real local governing mechanisms, in which case it becomes unrealistic and inefficient. One of the examples quoted on this point is the way in which the educational program committees operate. The intention was for the educational program committees within each faculty and section to be responsible for the design and renewal of education. But in reality a different situation applies. The educational program committees are for the most part passive bodies giving formal approval to decisions which have actually been taken elsewhere, usually within the departments.

The organizational principles recommended are expressed in terms of flexibility, integration, self-management, participation and the use of processes and projects. Only a couple of these terms will be commented on here. The present administration of higher education is founded on extensive functional specialization. This has led to a fragmentization of planning and administration. By contrast, the report emphasizes the need for cohesion and a comprehensive approach. Self-management denotes an effort to locate decisions and responsibility as close to the educational process as possible. Taken together, the two principles commented on here lead to a transfer of administrative resources from institutional unit level to area and departmental level.

The following are some of the organizational problems discussed.

One of these problems concerns the transformation of the teacher role. The traditional function of the teacher has been to provide special forms of instruction on special occasions and to hold examinations. But the task of the teacher should now be seen above all as entailing total responsibility for the educational situation of the student. Teachers must help and guide the student through his studies, and to this end they will often have to engage in organized co-operation. Teachers will thus become supervisors rather than instructors and examiners.

Another important problem is the organizational fragmentization which the 1977 higher education reform entails at the area level in between the university or college and its constituent departments. Decisions here are taken by various faculty boards and by various program committees. The report sees a danger in this fragmentization and recommends measures to secure coordination at area level.

REGIONAL AND CENTRAL LEVELS

The second interim report (September 1975) deals briefly with questions concerning the six regional boards set up by the 1977 reform and also with questions concerning the central authority in charge of higher education, the National Board of Universities and Colleges. The starting point in both cases is that the reform of higher education means a revised system of governance giving the universities and colleges a greater measure of independence. The main task of the regional boards should be to investigate and plan the regional distribution of educational amenities. In other words the regional boards ought not primarily to constitute an additional decision-making authority. The functions of the National Board of Universities and Colleges should be distinctly shifted from detailed regulation to the encouragement of renewal and efficiency.

INNOVATIONS AND INNOVATION PROCESSES

The third interim report (March 1977) contains two special studies, one of which is a random questionnaire study of educational changes while the other comprises seven case studies of innovation processes together with a discussion of their theoretical implications.

The statistical study shows that educational institutions which were formerly outside the sphere of higher education but were brought into it by the 1977 reform (in the study these institutions are represented by schools of education, graduate schools of social work and public administration, and schools of nursing) tend to a lesser extent than the universities to initiate innovations themselves and are instead more dependent on decisions taken by superior authorities. Within the universities the rate of change appears to be slower in medical and odontological studies than in other subjects. Arts subjects with small numbers of students and few teachers also appear to have relatively slow rates of change; presumably both the pressure and the resources conducive to change are limited.

The reported changes differ very widely in character, and it is therefore impossible to specify a small number of particularly dominant directions of change. According to the answers received, most of them from departmental directors of studies and corresponding teaching staff, teachers and students are important dynamic factors of change, while superior bodies and their actions or inaction are more of an obstruction than a help. Of course, these replies are influenced by the positions which the respondents occupy in the system. As is well known, critical attitudes towards superior authorities and their actions are widespread among teachers and researchers at post-secondary level.

The case studies refer to the following seven innovations: ABC courses in art at the University of Lund, Eastern European studies in Uppsala, proposals for the thematization and internationalization of Civics, the Environmental Studies Programme at the University of Lund, architectural studies at the Chalmers Institute of Technology, a course in systematic anatomy at the Karoline Institute, and Instructional TV at the Linköping Institute of Technology.

As far as is known, this is the first time that genuinely comparative case studies have been made of innovation processes in higher education. The case studies are comparative in the sense that they have been conducted according to uniform principles and have been analysed from uniform theoretical starting-points and with the aid of a systematic conceptual apparatus.

Thus the case studies have been integrated in a theoretical framework, based on the field theory of the German-American social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) and on a general systems approach.

The theoretical approach differs in a number of respects from the usual preoccupation of innovation research. The writers maintain that it is futile to try to establish a general theory of innovation. The explanatory models are bound to be dependent on the character of the innovation and on the character of the system (even though parts of the theory may be universally valid). The conditions of change are taken as being determined primarily by the properties of the system. The main properties of a system are membership structure, ideology, technology, organizational structure and relations to the outside world. In these respects, universities possess properties which distinguish them from other organisations.

Systems have a tendency to defend the interests of their members, their ideology, their technology, their organizational structure and the character of their relations to the outside world. One can distinguish between innovations which are consistent with the system, i e agree with its existing main properties, and those which are divergent from the system, because in some respect or other they pose a threat to one or more of its principal properties.

Whereas innovation researchers generally regard the innovation process as a diffusion or information process in which innovation is accomplished by imitation or intellectually based decisions by individuals, the writers regard development as a political process where innovations diverging from the system are concerned. This political process takes place in a field of conflicting forces around a state of equilibrium, and according to Lewin's theory it is the state of the field as a whole which explains the development. The writers adopt Lewin's division of the innovation process into three phases, viz unfreezing, movement and freezing. Unfreezing implies that the possibility of change arises. Movement implies a protracted lack of equilibrium due to dynamic forces being more powerful than restricting forces. Freezing implies the establishment of a new state of equilibrium.

The following conditions have to be satisfied in order for innovations to occur which deviate from the system. The existence of some kind of "crack" or conflict in the system is a prerequisite for change. The "crack" is caused by parts of the system (subsystems or individuals) deviating from the main properties of the system. In addition there must be a link between the "crack" and the surrounding world. Impulses from the outside world flow into the "crack" and "explode" the system by facilitating movement.

In describing certain aspects of the innovation process, use is made of the terms level of conflict, visibility, personnel changes, linkage, connection with external changes. But the writers regard this descriptive conceptual apparatus as very much of a temporary expedient. They believe on the other hand that the four concepts considered most essential as a means of explaining the innovation process - gain/loss (needs, interests), ownership, leadership and power - will be more durable.

This part of the investigation ends with a short section containing viewpoints on strategies of change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final report (March 1977) summarizes the conclusions reached in the various phases of the study and puts forward recommendations concerning the desirable course of development.

By way of introduction, the final report deals with some basic characteristics of higher education in Sweden. It is observed that from their very inception the Swedish universities formed part of the national administrative apparatus and served national purposes. By international standards, higher education in Sweden displays a high level of national uniformity. This has partly resulted from the highly centralized character of Swedish society, its ethnic and religious unity and its relative isolation in geographic and political terms. National centralism has been a source of strength in connection with the implementation of certain reforms and in guaranteeing qualitative and quantitative levels, but it has obstructed the diversity, flexibility and innovative effectiveness which are becoming more and more necessary. This antithesis constitutes one of the fundamental problems of higher education in Sweden.

The decision-making bodies are parts of a system of public administration. They are subordinate to the authority of the State in Sweden, but they also exercize that authority. This creates a special kind of tension between a centrally controlled bureaucracy recruited outside the educational and research community and, on the other hand, the autonomy which is rooted in educational activities and research.

Another characteristic feature is that public control and reform strategy are partly unrealistic and ineffective. Efforts should be made to develop higher education into more of a self-evaluating and self-renewing system within the framework of the official goals of education.

The disciplinary structure, i e the basing of organization and activities on subjects and departments, is pointed out as the strongest governing factor within the university sector of the higher education system. This predominant structure is both necessary and advantageous, but it needs to be supplemented by a multidisciplinary structure at base level.

The post-war period has seen a heavy expansion of higher education and research. This expansion cannot be expected to continue on the same scale. Consequently it will not be possible to continue with purely additive planning. In order to achieve something new, old activities will have to be wound up. The reordering of priorities will be a more prominent precondition of change.

As a background to the recommendations made, fundamental values and principles are presented with regard to education, governance and organization.

The authors maintain that undergraduate studies at present overemphasize the reproduction of information and the development of obsolete or obsolescent occupational skills. They call for a relative shift of emphasis in favour of various other educational objectives: a deeper understanding of central concepts, contexts and relationships, the capacity for critical analysis, creativity, the ability, together with other people, to solve new problems in new and complex connections, the capacity for self-analysis and for the determination of one's own role in a social context. A shift of this kind can be achieved by changes with regard to the means of education. The following are examples of such changes: opportunities of more active student involvement in education, a great element of independent study in groups, a shift of the teacher's role from cognitive transmission to supervision of the students' educational process, a greater element of problem and project-based education, the reappraisal of forms of examination.

Consideration is also given to the problem of uniformity versus flexibility and variety in education. Hitherto, efforts to meet the uncertainty surrounding the future have to a great extent taken the form of forecasts, central planning and fixed courses of study. The authors ask whether the uncertainty surrounding the future ought not to be met by means of variety and flexibility to a greater extent than has been the practice so far.

Governance and organization are treated in the reports according to the basic principles enunciated in the first interim report.

The presentation of dysfunctions and remedies takes up most of the final report. It is not possible here to paraphrase all the recommendations, but some indication will be given of their main content.

The authors maintain that the level of knowledge concerning higher education as a system is generally low. They recommend the support by the NBUC of organizationally-oriented research into higher education, the devotion by the NBUC of additional resources to the collection and processing of international research findings in this sector, and efforts by the NBUC and the universities and colleges to bring about a development of knowledge in this field by means of publications, courses and conferences, action research, organizational development etc, and also by making this development of knowledge a permanent feature of staff training.

Whereas the level of administrative awareness in Swedish higher education is high, planning awareness is fairly embryonic. The NBUC ought therefore to support the development of planning systems at colleges and universities. The experience of other countries should be utilized. Discussions and the interchange of experience between colleges and universities should be supported by means of courses and conferences, and staff training should give more scope to planning questions.

The report states that there are excessive limitations in the innovative effectiveness of higher education. Most of the recommendations made are aimed at the enhancement of innovative effectiveness. Concerning economic support, the authors recommend that special funds be made available at all levels for the encouragement of innovations. It is also important to stimulate personnel mobility within higher education and between higher education and the community at large.

Important measures for the promotion of efficiency and renewal include the provision of greater scope for discussions of goals in various forms at all levels, but particularly in subject departments and program committees, and also the development of a systematic evaluation of activities.

The governance of higher education in Sweden is shifting from the pre-eminently centralized regulation of details to a greater measure of decentralization and wider powers of discretion at local level. But there is a danger of these new principles of management being only halfheartedly implemented. It is proposed in the reports that earmarked allocations

should in principle comprise all activities at a university or college and, moreover, that a general review should be undertaken in order to secure a further reduction of the central regulation of details. The number of decision-making levels should be kept to a minimum, and decision-making procedures should be made as simple as possible. Permanent systems should be established for purposes of planning and development, the aim being to provide more scope for dynamic innovation processes and less for repetitive processes focussing on particular items of business. Ad hoc project groups and suchlike should be far more widely used than is the current practice. The Ministry of Education and the NBUC should be allotted a role that is more concerned with stimulating change and innovation than with regulation. The realization of this aim will demand a very heavy input of staff training.

A superabundance of data is produced in the higher education sector, at the same time as there is a striking shortage of relevant information in the right place at the right time. One reason for this is the discrepancy between the great resources devoted to the collection and production of data and the insignificant resources applied to the processing, distillation, synthesis and selective distribution of data. Another basic reason is that assessments of the need for information have not been integrated with the development of planning systems. A third material circumstance is that, relatively speaking, data concerning students have been overemphasized compared with data about other aspects of activities. For instance, there is a conspicuous lack of costing data. The report proposes that advanced research and development projects should be established in response to these viewpoints.

Staff training is one of the most important means of promoting the two endeavours which have occupied the focal point of the functional study, namely effectiveness and innovation capacity. One can distinguish between the two main types of staff training. One of them focusses on knowledge and skills which are needed in order to hold a certain appointment. The other is aimed at the achievment of emancipation and development - possibly in opposition to the very ideas and techniques which

are imposed by more job-oriented training. The writers maintain that great scope must be given to this latter kind of staff training. A combination of action research, organizational development and staff training should be tried out.

Teaching and research appointments are organized in a national, centrally determined, hierarchic and bureaucratic system. Duties are regulated by the definition of teaching and examination duties. This form of regulation inhibits the free utilization of personnel resources at local level, perpetuates a formal and conventional view of teaching and examinations and obstructs the transformation of the role of the teacher.

Another characteristic is that two different subsystems have developed, one comprising appointments which are mainly concerned with research and graduate teaching, and the other primarily concerned with undergraduate teaching. This dichotomy is prejudicial to the linkage between research and education.

The report recommends considerable alterations to the structure of appointments. The authors envisage a large corps of professors with a definite but flexible differentiation of duties, titles and rates of pay. In principle, research, graduate and undergraduate teaching should be included in the duties of all subcategories. Duties should not be defined in terms of teaching duties. Instead the departmental management should allocate duties within the framework of total working hours.

The studies which have been carried out have shown that leadership at local level (departments, programme committees and faculties, colleges and universities) is a crucial determinant of effectiveness and innovation capacity. The traditional centralism has prevented questions of local management from receiving the attention they deserve. Management and staff organization ought to the greatest possible extent to be developed without detailed central regulation.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE FUNCTIONAL STUDY

The NBUC has distributed the final report to Sweden's universities and colleges and has called on them to draw up programmes of action based on the viewpoints and recommendations presented in the report. The NBUC is also to draw up an action programme of its own for the prosecution of the functional study. The Minister of Education has called, on the strength of the functional study, for a special survey of organization and activities within the unit of the Ministry covering higher education and research.

Meantime two separate projects are in progress which are in line with or constitute an amplification of the ideas expressed in the functional study. The two ministerial studies most deserving of mention in this context are one concerning the decentralization of decision powers and another concerning the structure of teaching appointments in higher education. At NBUC level mention should above all be made of an activity evaluation project which mainly refers to the capacity of universities and colleges for self-evaluation, self-development and self-transformation.

REPORTS IN SWEDISH

The following have been published under the joint heading "Planning for Change in Higher Education":

1 Problems and Basic Principles. UKÄ-rapport 1975:4.

2 Regional and Central Levels. UKÄ-rapport 1975:20.

3 Innovations and Innovation Processes in Higher Education. UKÄ-rapport 1977:1.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations. UHÄ-rapport 1977:2.

PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH

Bertil Östergren: Planning for Change in Higher Education. Office of the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities. September 1975. (Summary of interim reports 1 and 2.)

Barbro Berg and Bertil Östergren: Innovations and Innovation Processes in Higher Education. National Board of Universities and Colleges. To be published in the autumn of 1977. (Translation of interim report 3.)

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